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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

Veterinarian Dreams about Bigger Cows

The USAID-funded project helps communities plan and carry out initiatives that create jobs and incomes in tension-ridden regions.



Veterinarian Ibrahimov is confident that healthier cows are an answer to the community's economic prosperity.

Photo: Mercy Corps

"The local economic development councils are a great idea, because we are forced to come together and solve our common problems,"

-says veterinarian Joldosh Ibragimov from Kara Dobo, Kyrgyzstan.

Veterinarian Joldosh Ibragimov from Kara Dobo, Kyrgyzstan doesn't pine to return to the days before Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991. But he does fondly recall one thing about Soviet period: big cows. In the late 1980s, Ibragimov and his colleagues at a collective farm engineered meaty, milk-laden cows using artificial insemination. But the farm collapsed when the USSR broke apart, and the genetic stock of the region's cattle has deteriorated steadily since.

Now Ibragimov plans to restore cows to their past heft, which he says would significantly raise incomes in a region where rearing cattle is a primary source of household revenue. His idea has been endorsed by new brand of economic development organization — a local council, organized by USAID and Mercy Corps's *Collaborative Development Initiative* (CDI), where representatives of Kara Dobo and six other communities meet to plot their common economic development destiny.

CDI has helped form seven Local Economic Development Councils to accelerate economic growth in the region plagued with ethnic and resource conflicts typical of Central Asia's Fergana Valley. Here, Stalinist-era borders delineate a fertile farming region with absolute disregard to topography, natural resources, or ethnicity. The USAID-funded project tackles these tensions by grouping Kyrgyzstan regional centers and villages according to geography and economic interests. Each village elects three members to a region-wide development council, which then identifies and prioritizes their top economic-development issues and projects. CDI helps to carry out those projects that address problems common to several communities.

Ibragimov says his idea to launch a roving artificial-insemination service meets the test: "Imagine if you could increase the amount of milk each cow provides by two liters a day, multiplied by six or seven som (20 cents) per liter, multiplied by 200 days, multiplied by approximately 5,000 heartier cows in the area. That's the kind of revenue we're talking about."

The area's Local Economic Development Council agrees. They put Ibragimov's project atop their list and asked CDI for \$2,500 to purchase equipment and supplies to open artificial insemination center. To share the costs, the town will donate an old workshop, which community will renovate, and pick up the salary of an insemination technician.

Once the service is up and running, Ibragimov says it will take only a few generations of inseminated cattle for a two-year-old calf to double its current weight of 200 kilograms. Once people see the financial benefits from the bulkier animals, he is confident they will happily pay the 250 som (about US\$6) insemination fee that will allow the project to sustain itself.